

Cummings: America's Students Left Behind *Again* Under GOP Agenda

Republicans Cut Billions in Education, Yet Call Vote on Boehner Bill for New Funds to DC Voucher Program

(Washington, D.C.) – Only weeks after cutting billions in education funding, House Republicans have scheduled a vote today on legislation (H.R. 471) that would increase the federal deficit by reestablishing the failed District of Columbia voucher program.

"Our highest priority must be to use limited taxpayer dollars to support programs that will truly meet all of our children's educational needs. This bill does not do that," said Congressman Cummings, the Ranking Member on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee. "Our children are the living messages we send to a future we will never see, so our commitment has to be to ensure that they all have an equal opportunity to a quality education." Cummings will lead the floor debate in opposition to the bill during today's House consideration.

H.R. 471 would divert public taxpayer funds away from educational programs that help all of the District's 70,000 students to support a lottery system that would pay for only 1.3 percent of the area's students to attend private schools. Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) will offer an amendment to redirect funding for private schools to improve public education in the District's public schools and charter schools.

The bill comes on the heels of the Republican-led continuing resolution for fiscal year 2011, H.R. 1, which slashed billions for education programs across the country. In the District of Columbia alone, Pell Grants would be reduced for nearly 44,000 students, 700 would lose their Head Start placements, 500 could face reduced or eliminated after-school placements, and 2,500 could lose supplemental educational services. Rather than passing legislation that robs students of the opportunity to succeed, Congress should be investing in innovative programs that prepare all our nation's students to compete in the global market.

Rigorous evaluation over several years has demonstrated that the D.C. voucher program has not yielded improved student achievement. Last year, the Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences evaluated the D.C. voucher program and found that there was no overall statistically significant impact, positive or negative, on reading or math achievement among students participating in the program. Additional research found that the voucher program failed to show that the program improved the academic achievement of students from schools in need of improvement, which Congress designated as the highest priority group of the program. By comparison, reading and math test scores did improve among students enrolled in the public and public charter schools from 2007 to 2010.

President Obama issued a Statement of Administrative Policy in opposition to the bill, stating "the Federal Government should focus its attention and available resources on improving the quality of public schools for all students. Private school vouchers are not an effective way to improve student achievement." The President's fiscal year 2012 budget requested funding to improve D.C. public schools and expand high-quality public charter schools.

-30-